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SOCIAL MOBILIZATION AND ORGANIZATION OF THE POOR

REPORT ON THE WORKSHOP ON SOCIAL MOBILIZATION AND ORGANIZATION OF THE POOR

(Tunis, Tunisia - 15-18 November 1993)

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ANNEX: List of participants in the Workshop

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Secretary-General of UNCTAD, Mr. K. K. S. Dadzie, convened the Workshop on Social Mobilization and Organization of the Poor, in Tunis, Tunisia, from 15 to 18 November 1993. The Workshop was organized with the financial support of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Government of the Netherlands, and was hosted by the Government of Tunisia. It gathered more than thirty experts from all regions of the world (see annex), participating in their personal capacity, including governmental experts from Ministries of planning, local administration or social affairs, experts from non-governmental organizations and people's movements, experts from the United Nations and other multilateral organizations, and experts from bilateral donor agencies and the academic world. The Workshop thus provided a rare occasion for high-level representatives of different actors involved in the process of social mobilization and organization of the poor to meet together to engage in intensive dialogue, and to learn from one another.

2. The Workshop was opened by Mr. K. Nabli, Minister of Planning and Regional Development of the Government of Tunisia, and closed by Mr. F. Khalil, Minister of Social Affairs of Tunisia. Their statements supplied valuable insights into the poverty alleviation policies and programmes being pursued by the Tunisian Government, in which social mobilization and organization of the poor constituted an integral part.

3. In his statement, the Secretary-General of UNCTAD emphasized that poverty remained an unacceptable scourge in today's world. The lessons and experiences of the fight against poverty in the past decades had led policy-makers to focus increasingly on the need to devise alternative strategies which would reconnect marginal and vulnerable groups with the process of growth and development. Hence the crucial importance of social mobilization and organization of the poor, which national policies, in general, had not yet integrated as a development instrument.

4. The UNCTAD secretariat prepared a short "issues note" containing a number of questions to be addressed by the Workshop. This issues note is reproduced in section II of this report.

5. The Workshop succeeded in producing detailed and comprehensive conclusions, outlining essential orientations and guidelines for integrating participatory dimensions into national and international development programmes and strategies. These have been summarized by the UNCTAD secretariat and are included in section III of this report.

II. OVERVIEW AND MAIN ISSUES FOR DISCUSSION [1]

A. Background: rationale for social mobilization and organization of the poor

6. Over the last two decades there has been growing recognition of "participatory development" (PD) as an approach to improving the conditions of life of the people in developing countries. This is due both to the failures of the strategies which rely exclusively on "trickle-down" and "top-down" approaches to development to bring the degree of poverty to acceptable levels, and to the achievements of PD initiatives on the ground. International consensus on the principle of PD as a means of poverty alleviation is growing. It is also largely recognized that PD is essential for ensuring the sustainability of development as it is a decisive means for building up social consensus and changing practices on a large scale in the management of natural resources. This, however, is yet to be translated into decisive policy and action in this direction by the dominant international institutions and national authorities. Participation is also understood differently by different quarters, and the idea of promoting organizations of poor people remains a sensitive one to many governments because of its power implications. It may, therefore, be asked how the real commitment of political authorities and administrative entities to participatory development through the mobilization and organization of the people may be assessed.

B. Main characteristics and trends of evolving grassroots movements and activities

7. In the evolving grassroots movements and activities, the contribution of outside catalytic agents (facilitators, animators, etc.), has been very important. Such agents are linking with indigenous participatory initiatives; stimulating the transformation of existing indigenous cooperative cultures into forces of collective development; and animating such processes in new localities. Processes such as sensitization, participatory action research, training schemes and use of cultural activities, are being introduced as ways of promoting people's awareness of their economic and social rights.

8. Thus stimulated and mobilized, the people are using a variety of ways, some very imaginative, to improve their status. These include internal resource mobilization, cooperative economic activities and the formation and spreading of skills by collective methods. Relatively more such mobilization is observed in rural than in urban areas because, in developing countries, most of the poor are located in rural areas, and also because traditional community values are relatively better preserved in such areas.

9. Participatory initiatives are being strengthened by capacity-building programmes which use both conventional methods of "training" as well as "alternative" methods based on interactive dialogue.

10. People's initiatives need external liaison with various quarters for different purposes. Such liaison services are provided more by the catalytic agents than by people's organizations themselves. Independent linking between people's organizations belonging to the programmes of different catalytic agencies is also relatively rare.

11. Some of the conditions for the "success" of participatory initiatives have been a careful choice of "entry points" by the catalytic agencies from the point of view of potential resistance; stimulating people's own collective enquiries rather than "transferring knowledge" to them; avoidance of external credit or other material assistance as a motivation for organizing; personal style of

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1/ This section reproduces the "Issues note" which was prepared by the UNCTAD secretariat, for presentation to the participants as a basis for discussions.

interaction of external animators with the people; and competent technical support to people's economic activities when needed.

C. Government policies and measures affecting the participatory process

12. In recent times the macro development strategies of most developing countries have been following the structural adjustment programme (SAP) promoted and supported by the Bretton Woods institutions. It is now largely recognized that these programmes have in many cases adversely affected low-income groups, at least in the short run. The growth performance of many countries and, in particular, most low-income countries, has also been poor, so that the prospect of long-run "trickle-down" benefits reaching the poorest groups is also limited.

13. The question, therefore, arises whether PD is to be viewed as an approach merely for short-term poverty alleviation or as a strategy in its own right for long-term growth. The Independent South Asian Commission on Poverty Alleviation has recommended the mainstreaming of PD as a strategy for poverty alleviation with growth for the SAARC region, observing the high marginal saving rates and low capital intensity of people's developmental initiatives. For other regions as well, it seems important to ask whether there is a conflict between growth and equity, i.e. whether the mainstreaming of PD might compromise the growth potentials of these economies or contribute positively to growth. This inquiry is essential in order to develop clarity on the place of PD in a macro development strategy.

14. However, vested interests may create obstacles to the mainstreaming of PD as a development strategy. The immediate tasks, therefore, are to work toward expansion of the political space for PD and to aim at the advancement of the quality of participatory initiatives in terms of their contribution not only to short-run poverty alleviation but also to long-term economic growth in order to enhance the case of PD for mainstreaming.

15. Some strategic areas in which government policy action could help the advancement of PD are :

(i) Laws on organizing and reconciling different organizing laws

The right to organize for collective development work must be granted to all people. A problem in this area is the existence of three different types of movements - the trade union movement, the cooperative movement, and the participatory development movement - which belong to three different traditions with their own historical evolutions and partisan loyalties and which are subsequently governed by three different legal frameworks. The advancement of PD would be helped by reconciling these three trends.

(ii) Agrarian reform

The need is recognized for agrarian reform to give control over agricultural assets to the direct producers as secure bases to undertake participatory initiatives. But the implementation of agrarian reform is resisted by vested interests whose political power, paradoxically, most often increase with the introduction of political democracy.

(iii) Credit for the assetless and asset-poor

The evidence is strong today that, with group liability and appropriate institutional support, poor people are excellent borrowers, often better than the higher-income groups. Therefore, it does not appear justified that credit to the assetless and asset-poor be financed only by limited donor grants while the regular banking institutions should continue to channel society's savings exclusively to more affluent people. Reform of banking procedures to extend bank loans for group-based initiatives of the people should be on the agenda today.

(iv) "Urban-bias"

The "urban-bias" contributes to the growth of high-consumption cultures and also locates people in contexts which make PD relatively more difficult. This explains why promotion of PD calls for priority to be given to rural development, on the one hand, and policies to develop enterprises of a family or community type in the urban sector on the other hand. The problem of giving priority to rural development is also a political one, arising out of the relative political influence of urban elites on national policy.

(v) Decentralization

Decentralization may help in reducing the urban bias and is also a measure in its own right to facilitate PD. As it makes the local official a key actor in local development, the latter needs to be properly sensitized and motivated in order to facilitate people's initiatives rather than stifling them. Decentralization may also increase the power of local vested interests vis-à-vis the poorest segments of the population unless mechanisms can be devised to make the local administration work directly with the people and be accountable to such local bodies in which people's organizations have a real voice.

(vi) Replication

The replication of participatory initiatives presupposes the availability of sufficient political space, and government support in various ways to the spreading of such initiatives. But this raises the question of assessment of the quality of PD initiatives whose replication might be encouraged, involving in turn technical questions which governments may not be best equipped to assess. PD initiatives using a lot of external resources may also not be widely replicable, either because of shortage of such resources, or because national self-determination might eventually be compromised thereby. There is, finally, a complex question of the spatial strategy of replication - i.e. spreading thin over wide geographical space versus covering contiguous areas first -calling for a careful policy decision: in strongly socially polarized societies it may be easier, from the political point of view, to spread out thin; but this may lessen both the scope and the impact of initiatives and would keep these initiatives isolated in different locations and more dependent on continuous presence of the catalytic agencies, thus slowing down the pace of replication itself.

D. Relationship between the actors involved in the process

16. The competence of government agencies to do direct grassroots work with the people is in question. There have been pilot experiments which have done impressive work, but have faced bureaucratic problems leading to the creation of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to carry the work further. Moreover, there is a risk that a substantial amount of development resources at the command of governments may continue to promote non-participatory "development", thereby restricting space for genuine PD.

17. While impressive grassroots work is being done by many NGOs, taking all such agencies together, their activities are extremely diverse and their work of uneven quality. Even those which are promoting strong participatory processes have faced difficulties in promoting the self-reliance of people's organizations. NGOs, moreover, can exhibit an "empire" mentality hampering the networking among people's organizations which is required for strengthening their voice in national affairs. This leads to the important question of the accountability of NGOs and of the formation of some kind of moral authority to set standards for and monitor NGOs' work without directly controlling such work.

18. People's organizations in their turn may be challenged to deepen their work in promoting productive activities contributing to economic growth as well as in taking "spearhead" roles in the spreading of participatory initiatives. They may thus become effective partners of the NGOs and use NGO resources only as a complement for extending PD initiatives.

19. The practice of foreign agencies doing direct grassroots work may be questioned from both cultural as well as political points of view. It seems more desirable for foreign agencies to work toward developing national capabilities in appropriate fields. The phenomenon of foreign donor support to local NGO work is a sensitive one, involving questions of ideological influence on grassroots work, disorientation of such work by over-assistance, and helping the creation of privileged PD models which are not replicable on a wide scale. The "empire" mentality operates here also, and the question of accountability of foreign donors as well to the society may be raised. Foreign donor dependence remains a weakness of the entire PD movement and limits social support for it.

20. NGOs face a problem in developing the desired "subject-subject" relationships with the people, because of unequal status and the power they bring with them to help improve the people's lives. There is need for greater sensitivity in this matter and for a conscious effort to give the people self-confidence, including the initiation of processes for NGO workers to learn from the people as well as be accountable to them. In general, there is a prevalent dichotomy between the structures of NGOs and the people's structures they help to create. The main problem here is that the structure of the former has the power to influence the latter's life. Therefore a question of accountability of the NGOs to the people at the grassroots is also pertinent.

21. There could be more constructive collaboration between NGOs to deepen the standards of grassroots work, to improve its average quality, and to work together toward the development of people's organizations that cut across NGO affiliations. All channels for improving the relation with governments should be explored.

22. In view of the various considerations raised above, the desired expansion of PD work is not a question of mere expansion of scale: a major expansion of PD needs to be seen as part of an integral development effort of the society, which would be accountable to the society, with the people having the most important voice.

Main issues for discussion

23. The Workshop is invited to consider the following clusters of issues in the order in which they have been presented above.

A. Rationale for social mobilization and organization of the poor

(1) PD, which started as a faint note of dissent in the 1970s, has become a serious, legitimate proposal on the development table today. Which are the factors that have led to such a degree of consensus, at least in international circles? Accordingly, what is the rationale for social mobilization and organization of the poor?

(2) What are the potential and limitations of a demand-driven bottom-up approach? According to country situations, what are the possible options open to governments for integrating people's participation in national development strategies?

(3) How to assess the commitment of governments to promote PD and monitor progress of countries in this direction? What criteria, indicators, etc., should be devised and used for such purpose?

(4) How does an international development agency or a national aid agency

translate its commitment to PD? How should it re-orient the work of its staff - research, field development, cooperation, advocacy - in a serious effort to contribute to the promotion of PD? And how to monitor efforts and results?

B. Processes of mobilization and organization of the poor

(1) What are the main processes which lead to the emergence and development of various types of grassroot movements and activities?

(2) What are the conditions which facilitate an indigenous dynamic of such processes, with or without the support of catalysts?

(3) What is the external liaison required for the expansion of activities around which organizations are created?

(4) How can the trade union movement, the cooperative movement and the PD movement be reconciled ?

C. Government policies and institutional framework affecting participatory processes

(1) What are the various perceptions of governments vis-à-vis PD, and the organization and mobilization of the poor? Is PD seen merely as an approach to mitigate the adverse effects on the people of a mainstream development strategy that is non-participatory? Is it seen as the desired main component of their strategy of development?

(2) What is the institutional framework required for facilitating PD, especially in creating an enabling environment for NGOs and people's movements: political space, legal and regulating framework, decentralization, and policies and measures?

(3) Which policies in respect of access of the poor to productive assets (e.g. agrarian reform) are essential for the mobilization and organization of the poor around productive activities?

(4) How can the "urban bias" in development be corrected so as to involve a larger number of people more easily in participatory development ?

(5) How can the regular banking institutions in a society be made to serve the assetless and asset-poor people to assist participatory development?

(6) What is the best way of promoting the accountability of local government officials to the people under decentralization ?

(7) What standards should be sought in participatory activities to qualify for replication ?

(8) What spatial strategy for replication can governments support - spreading thin over wider space or concentrating on covering contiguous areas first ?

(9) In a context of growing recognition of the role of NGOs, what are the new developments in the cooperation between the latter and governmental entities and how can these developments be promoted?

D. Relationship between the actors involved in social mobilization and organization of the poor

(1) What are the respective roles between the various actors involved in social mobilization and organization of the poor - NGOs, governments, external donors - with a view to enhancing the promotion of people's

movements? What forms of cooperation between these actors help to maximize their efficiency in alleviating poverty?

(2) Should a government agency directly engage in catalytic work to promote participatory development? If not, through which intermediaries should it channel its support?

(3) How can NGOs be made socially accountable for their work with the people?

(4) How can the quality of the work of NGOs be improved towards promoting dynamic efficiency of people's groups in terms of contribution to productive activities?

(5) How can NGOs establish a genuinely subject-subject relation with the people, given unequal status and powers to start with ?

(6) How can NGOs be made to encourage and work towards the promotion of networking among people's organizations, for the development of broader federations of people's organizations and hence a stronger national voice of the people ?

(7) How can NGOs working with the people raise resources internally so as to be less dependent on external donors for their work ?

(8) How can bilateral and multilateral aid agencies change their practices in programme design and implementation, in order to integrate the PD dimension into them?

(9) How can external donor agencies supporting grassroots work be made accountable to the society for possible abuse of power of finance ?

(10) How can external donors be sensitized about the damage they may do by way of over-assistance and misdirection of the activities of their clients and by helping the creation of expensive "show pieces" which may not be replicable on a wide scale ?

III. CONCLUSIONS OF THE WORKSHOP ON SOCIAL MOBILIZATION AND ORGANIZATION OF THE POOR

A. Rationale for social mobilization and organization of the poor

24. In the world today there is a growing awareness of the inherent value and dignity of the human person as the subject of his own integral development process. This calls for a profound revision of the development concept, opening it up to encompass the improvement of the quality of human life, and casting a new light on the issue of the world's poor.

1. Economic rationale

25. It was pointed out that during the immediate post-colonial era it was expected that the economic independence of nations would follow political independence. This has not occurred and poverty has worsened, raising the question of the development potential that is lost through the exclusion of large numbers of poor people from the mainstream of economic activity.

26. In the past, development assistance tended to be targeted at stimulating investment, technology transfer and large-scale infrastructure developments which have been prioritized at the expense of human resources development. In addition, country perceptions of development focused on the delivery of goods and services rather than on human development and the quality of life. The benefits of this approach rarely trickled down to the poor.

27. Externally driven development strategies had proved to be unsustainable and evaluation of the first generation of structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) indicated that the trickle-down effects of general economic growth and specific national programmes were meagre as they did not reach the poor on any significant scale. Indeed, the negative impacts of SAPs on the poor - which were expected to be short in duration - have persisted into the longer term. The conclusion was that growth was a necessary but not a sufficient condition for the reduction of poverty.

28. To resolve the problems, a new strategy was advocated based on a macro-level policy of economic liberalization and sustained growth, together with a mix of parallel and complementary policies which would catalyze a process of accumulation by the poor themselves as the most direct and sustainable way to alleviate poverty. Such a strategy would enable the poor also to contribute to human development, growth and equity, as a part of a single process. This pro-poor strategy was a major finding of the Independent South Asian Commission on Poverty Alleviation. Evidence from successful poverty reduction programmes around the world showed that groups of poor people were able to lift themselves to a sustainable, self-supporting status under a number of conditions: they needed access to resources (e.g. land, inputs, credit), basic infrastructure (e.g. education, health care, drinking water, roads), employment opportunities and institutional arrangements which will allow them to exercise their choice and individuality, and to be actively involved in decision-making in order to determine their self-development. National governments, the poor themselves, NGOs and the regional and international agencies, all have roles to play in helping to generate this kind of enabling environment.

2. Political rationale

29. Widespread political support for a participatory development approach to national economic growth is based, inter alia, on ethical considerations. It was regarded as unacceptable that large proportions of the populations in developing countries, especially in rural communities, were denied their basic human rights as they could not afford to buy or did not produce sufficient food to meet their daily requirements. Relative to their more affluent counterparts, they had shorter life expectancy, higher infant mortality and high levels of illiteracy - inter alia, because of limited access to social services.

30. In addition, poverty could trigger political instability and social unrest. With this in mind, Governments may see advantages in promoting PD as a means of preventing social disintegration and so develop an enabling environment which will foster stable economic growth, in which the poor can participate fully and in which there is a more equitable distribution of resources.

31. In countries where the centralized role of the State has been associated with elitist structures and the exclusion of a large majority of the people from the processes and fruits of development, growing disenchantment and even ruptures between the State and civil society have generated a new interest in decentralization and the devolution of power to the local levels, with social mobilization as a principal means of action.

32. Some governments, in their efforts to consolidate democracy, are looking into existing structures and organizations. Others see the need to create an enabling environment for developing new organizations of the poor at the grassroots level through social mobilization.

3. Social rationale

33. In the discussion on the plight of the poor, it was underlined that they suffer because they are marginalized and unorganized in many respects, isolated from mainstream development, and often fatalistic and insecure. In addition, they have no access to the information and technology which are relevant and indispensable for their development, and they lack savings, employment and other opportunities. In some countries, dowry, inheritance and other traditional systems are exploited by local elites, thereby prolonging the subjugation of the poor.

34. People have the ability to reason and to use information once it is made available to them, and the idea of self-reliance should be paramount. External catalysts should function as animators who can motivate and guide the poor but without creating dependence.

35. There should also be respect for the ethnic, cultural and other diversities which exist in poor societies. Even though systems should be as integrative as possible, they should utilize endogenous structures, information and technologies, traditional values, and so on. In this regard, efforts at mobilization are more likely to be successful if they are based on common interests and concerns.

36. Therefore, the need was seen for more democratic and participatory approaches which should be area-specific, enterprise-specific, problem-specific and effectively targeted. They must also incorporate a component of assistance to promote the institutional organization of the poor. Such approaches need to enhance employment opportunities and provide the poor with access to productive resources.

37. In supporting such activities, governments themselves should not create or superimpose new systems and organizations. Rather, the State should help poor communities through training schemes which will affect the decentralization of programmes to the local level. As a part of this process, Governments have a responsibility to allow communities to develop their own solutions to their problems.

38. In summary, possible complementary approaches might be: (i) new employment generation and the stimulation of investment; (ii) a social approach involving social transfers and a more equitable distribution of assets and resources; (iii) a genuinely participatory approach involving disadvantaged members of the community in decision-making; and (iv) creating a macro-economic and enabling environment which is non-discriminatory and stable over the long term.

4. Limitations

39. Often, the dominant relation of power and production and the values legitimizing them constituted powerful structural obstacles to the promotion of participatory development. These obstacles have existed for a long time. There were also elements of an orthodoxy which have evolved and taken an extremely sophisticated form. They have been internalized by those in authority. Therefore, it is clear that resistance to the participation of the poor in development will be substantial.

40. There has been a potential conflict between the political and economic rationales for PD. In economic terms, a principal focus has been on the cost-effectiveness of assisting the poor, but there is also political effectiveness to be considered. This tends to reduce the likelihood that governments would assist the poorest of the poor - a group which is not well organized, does not have close relations with government, and is the least threatening in terms of its power. In contrast, the relatively poor or new poor - who usually come from the organized middle classes that have been disenfranchised economically as a result of such developments as structural adjustments or natural calamities of vast proportions - represent a potentially greater political threat and are, therefore, more likely to be assisted.

41. Similarly, there are many problems associated with local elites who may become more powerful under PD programmes, capturing the benefits and thereby further marginalizing the poor who should be the beneficiaries. It may be incorrect to assume that in all cases the mere involvement of local-level elected institutions in the planning and implementation of activities would necessarily lead to a better choice of programmes, their more effective implementation and greater benefits for the poor. Elected institutions are often dominated by local elites who have different priorities from the poor and the broader community.

42. It was also pointed out that in the case of refugees and displaced persons the usual processes of PD do not apply. Similarly, PD does not automatically imply the involvement of women. In fact, existing modernization processes had gradually marginalized women in traditional societies because the new institutional structures are largely placed in the hands of men through traditional gender specialization. Even in poor communities, poor women are doubly exploited.

43. Hence arguments that dignity, humanity, individuality, human rights and equitable involvement of the poor are central to PD programmes prove to be entirely analogous to those concerning the participation of women in development. In other words, the issue is not to organize the poor, but to help them to organize themselves, while recognizing at the same time that PD, by itself, will not automatically reduce poverty.

44. Problems remain in formulating macro and micro linkages and connecting people with government policy. Generally, while macro and micro approaches must be consistent, care must be exercised in developing fully integrated policies and programmes. Integration of poor people into national programmes has often been unsuccessful. The most important aspect is that the macro environment must be stable in order to provide a long-term and secure environment for the more specific programmes which underlie it.

45. Access to credit was perceived as a key limitation to the achievement of maximum benefits from PD approaches. The high transaction costs of providing large volumes of small loans to people in remote areas, who are inexperienced in dealing with formal institutions, means that credit is rarely available to them. Similarly, extension services cost more per unit of output when delivered to the poor, and research for the special marginal areas where the poor live is likely to be most costly and provide only small benefits. This means that the institutions for providing such services and inputs may require subsidization - even if the resources and services themselves do not.

46. The current practices of donor organizations may also be a limiting factor in social mobilization for two main reasons. First, the justification for programme implementation is predetermined on the basis of established criteria, which has often limited PD, particularly in project formulation. Secondly, in bilateral assistance the actors tend to be at the State level rather than explicitly involving the poor. Therefore, ways should be found to extend bilateral protocols to new groups. Changes in the process are taking place and need to be encouraged.

47. Finally, limitations are also related to major international economic issues, in particular those of debt and trade. Concerning the latter, there was a paradox between the free trade policies imposed through international conditionality and the on-going practices of subsidies to local producers in industrialized countries that, together with tariff and non-tariff trade barriers, nullify opportunities for the trade of the developing countries, thus aggravating the condition of the poor and impeding efforts at poverty alleviation. Furthermore, some participants felt that a balanced conclusion of the GATT negotiations could help mitigate, at least in the short run, the negative effects of the secular decline in terms of trade for agriculture and to a certain extent offset the impacts of relatively high prices for manufactured goods imported by developing countries.

B. Main characteristics and trends of evolving grassroots movements and activities

1. The nature of community-based organizations (COBs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs)

48. The issue of direct representation and self-management provided a context for distinguishing CBOs from NGOs. CBOs and NGOs are generally distinguished as primary and secondary organizations respectively. Primary organizations are formed and managed by members of the community itself. Secondary organizations are usually formed and managed by outsiders. The fact that CBOs are primary organizations does not underplay the significance of NGO work at various levels of society. In some countries, NGOs have been central to community development efforts and pressures for democratization.

49. Communities may not always be able to organize themselves spontaneously, especially in conditions of extreme poverty and social stress, or where the communities themselves are deeply divided. In such situations, external catalysts may be needed to facilitate the process of collective action.

50. It was observed that the current climate of liberalization and democratization has led to an explosion of NGOs. But not all organizations that register as NGOs are concerned with community development and the mobilization of the poor. Some are driven by the economic self-interests of the elites, while others are extensions of donor agencies and State systems with development agendas that often do not coincide with the goals of participation. Participation may be preached more than it is practised, often in order to fulfil the rules of the new game. Or the process of participation may be followed in a mechanical way without the catalyst or the poor really experiencing any internalized learning. Therefore, it is necessary to separate participatory types of NGOs from other types of organization.

2. The role of catalysts in promoting sustainable mobilization

51. It should be remembered that processes leading to collective action are fundamental to social mobilization. These may occur spontaneously but often the intervention of an outside catalyst may be necessary and useful. The successful operation of a catalyst has to be based on a deep and sensitive understanding of the particular cultural traditions of the area or group: society as it is and the people as they are, should be the starting points.

52. The approach of mobilization is best made by catalysts who see the people at the grassroots level as very valuable resources and depositories of knowledge and wisdom. A degree of humility is necessary for successful grassroots animation work. This spirit would then lead to the adoption of a Socratic method of work in which listening and questioning guide the approach. Consciousness-raising, alternative or informal education, and social-awareness raising are processes by which problems are identified, solutions emerge and linages are made to the structural contexts that create the problems and may constrain the solutions.

53. The process of mobilization may require early identification by the group of some potential steps to be taken quite quickly - perhaps in the field of economic activity or social provisioning - and practical skills may need to be acquired or further developed to carry out these steps. While the process starts with relatively small groups, in most cases it is important that it is not limited to that starting point.

54. At some point, community groups should be able to continue the work of the organization, without the presence of the catalysts, and to run it effectively. The goal of self-management should be central to the overall objectives of the project. The ultimate test of the success of participation is whether the catalysts are able to withdraw without compromising the quality and viability of the project.

55. The participants felt that withdrawal was necessary and possible provided that strategies aimed at preventing dependency relations were pursued; others believed that premature withdrawal might endanger the survival of the projects. In any case, the process of withdrawal must be planned for at the very outset of catalytic intervention.

3. Social hierarchies as obstacles to mobilization

56. Communities are seldom homogeneous. They are often divided on the basis of the control people had over productive assets, networks of patronage and access to State power. Even among poverty groups, differences in levels of well-being could be discerned. Participants therefore agreed that it was necessary to have a clear social map of the communities to define correctly the target population.

57. It was noted that sometimes, even when a group had been identified, the wrong individuals may capture many of the benefits, or the catalysts may simply miss their target. There is a need, therefore, to address not only the problems of the target population, but also the range of groups and elites who are likely to undermine the coverage and efficacy of participatory programmes.

58. Some collaboration with governments, which may have better regulatory mechanisms for dealing with problems of leakage, may be necessary.

4. The cultural context for mobilization

59. Culture plays a major role in the social and economic lives of all people. However, it often imposes constraints on strategies for social change. Therefore, the cultural context in which the poor operate needs to be taken seriously if participatory initiatives are to be successful.

60. It was noted that the cultural domain had both hegemonic and libertarian elements. It could provide a context for oppression as well as for liberation. In situations where there is oppression, a primary condition for participation is resistance. Such resistance may lead to major institutional reforms, thus opening up new economic and political opportunities to previously excluded communities.

5. The political context for participation

61. Effective participation requires an open political system which guarantees basic rights of organization, expression and representation. Some Governments

may, however, be hostile to the poor and may impose restrictions on free political activities and grassroots organizations.

62. Notwithstanding the persistence of authoritarian practices in many countries, participants believed that there had been a positive trend towards greater freedom and democratization, which was likely to strengthen efforts aimed at promoting participatory development. In recent years, donor Governments and multilateral agencies have attempted to support this process of political liberalization by tying economic assistance to issues of human rights and democratization.

63. Although participatory processes may in some places need to appear to be non-political, the whole process is necessarily political in that it requires or presupposes a redistribution of power and brings local grassroots organizations potentially into conflict with local elites and/or the State. Society is not static or neutral, but an arena for the struggle between a number of different groups. Voluntary organizations, CBOs, associations, NGOs, trade unions, church organizations, political parties, business groups and other types of organizations, are all in the midst of this struggle.

64. It may be important for States to recognize institutionally the basic community units where the participatory process is happening so that there is a better match between the governmental process and grassroots activities.

65. Finally, it was observed that participatory work in the socio-economic field should not be divorced from consciousness-raising and advocacy work. Advocacy work involves, however, risks which may strain relations between governments and NGOs.

C. Government policies and measures affecting the participatory process

1. Macro-economic policies

66. Generally, development plans have been designed, adopted and implemented without broad participation. Recently, this has assumed specific significance in relation to structural adjustment programmes. For most countries, the design and monitoring of programmes have been more or less confined to top policy-makers, local and external technocrats and the external donor community. In the discussion, participants referred to their national experiences in addressing the above-mentioned problems.[2]

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[2]/ The following are some examples:

(1) The Tunisian Government was able to negotiate an adjustment programme with the IFIs on its own terms, entailing a signiciant degree of adaptability and flexibility in the design of the programme. There was not a sharp disengagement of the State from the key sectors of the economy, essential commodities were subsidized for the most vulnerable groups, and employment-generation schemes were encouraged. In this way the adjustment programme was conceived as being conducive to participatory development.

(2) The report of the independent South African Commission on Poverty Alleviation was accepted by the SAARC member States in March 1993. While the need for adjustment was accepted, it was also recognized that in addition a pro-poor strategy should be developed and put in place to complement adjustment measures. The proposals of the Commission were founded on the principle that the poor have a capacity to invest profitably, increase productivity and save. A programme of pro-poor measures would involve a series of complementary measures, including agricultural development, food security, labour-intensive development, human resource development and decentralization. These proposals offered an opportunity to engage political leaders and aid donors in policy dialogue and in rethinking conventional prescriptions. The World Bank ran its

67. In some countries, formal participation is implicitly indicated and tried. However, its effective use depends on how one defines participation. In most countries, the experience shows that, for a formal participatory environment to be upheld, both the role of the State in general and that of the government in particular have to be redefined. But most of the actors in government are unwilling to withdraw from the traditional role they are used to playing. Hence, the establishment of a participatory environment is in direct conflict with existing bureaucratic interests.

68. The concern for the social dimension of the adjustment process was recognized as a welcome move. However, there are notable exceptions and the types of programmes being advocated in collaboration with external donors are not necessarily geared to answering the real poverty status of the most vulnerable groups. There are problems here in the dialogue as to what types of projects deserve the top-most attention - both on the donors' side and on the side of the coordinators of the social dimension programmes in the host country.

69. The linkages between macro-economic policies and PD policies appear to be obvious, although the macro framework does not directly relate to the question of mobilization. Questions were voiced, however, on the dangers of over-stressing the prerequisites of a proper macro-economic environment at the expense of immediate efforts to promote a more effective participatory framework.

70. Against the above, there was clear agreement that the macro-economic framework is a central element in creating an environment which is conducive or obstructive to participatory initiatives. For example, (i) in the design of structural adjustment programmes, participants pointed to the dangers of confining negotiations to an isolated framework, surrounded by high confidentiality, thereby impeding wider participation in the decision-making process; (ii) the liberal model which is currently dominant appears to encourage participatory development, at least theoretically. But in practice, one questions whether or not the model's insistence on the free markets leads to a genuine competitive environment on a global level. Furthermore, the implications that this scenario has for initiatives aimed at instituting a more participatory environment which would allow a greater say to marginal groups needs to be carefully considered and assessed.

71. Finally, the broader international economic context imposes limitations on the extent to which governments are able to pursue poverty-reduction strategies; trade barriers and low commodity prices limit export revenues and the debt burden reduces the amounts available to spend on social development.

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own workshop in September 1993 to discuss the report, identify areas of common concern and issues for further research.

(3) Similarly, in Bolivia, the Government demonstrated a strong commitment to human resource and sustainable development during the course of its adjustment effort, creating ministries with special responsibilities in this areas. In preference to a wholesale privatization drive, the Government introduced a capitalization programme to encourage foreign investment in profitable State enterprises.

(4) In some countries, programmes to mitigate the impact of adjustment measures on poor and vulnerable groups had been introduced to complement macro-economic reforms. Yet experience from Uganda with the PAPSCA programme suggested that the content of such programmes was neither adequate to tackle the problem at hand, nor consistent with poverty alleviation. In Cameroon, despite the allocation of $50 million to local NGOs for pro-poor programmes, there was little consultation over the design and content of key adjustment measures which impacted adversely on the poor.

2. Sectoral policies

72. There were priority areas where NGO involvement and a participatory development approach should feature prominently. These areas included: (a) the right to employment as an integral component of local development plans, directed towards the creation and maintenance of public infrastructure and productive assets; (b) improving the availability of drinking water in rural areas; (c) primary and adult education programmes centred in village communities; and (d) primary health care and sanitation programmes. In addition to these, agrarian reform, credits for the assetless and urban development policies were important areas of NGO involvement.

3. Decentralization

73. Decentralization should be broadly defined to accommodate the devolution of administrative structures, of power and planning functions, and of financial resources. It was felt that the following issues deserve the closest attention:

(i) Decentralization is not without problems and there are a number of considerations which need to be taken into account by governments seeking to follow this route. Experience suggests that a long period of gestation is required for successful decentralization. Local heterogeneity means that decentralization cannot proceed at the same pace in all localities, but has to allow for a variety of cultural characteristics and educational needs.

(ii) Decentralization implies a transfer of competence, skills and resources to local actors. The sheer size of some countries means that there are formidable problems of communication and the spreading of resources over very large areas. In this context, cost implications of participatory development should be clearly specified. Schemes for resource mobilization should be designed accordingly, together with a system of distribution between rich and poor areas.

(iii) A further problem is that local leaders may not always be representative of the people, and the power of local authorities may be circumscribed by the local elites. This suggests that decentralization has to be accompanied by more fundamental political reforms if it is to be successful. For example, ways to ensure effective representation by the marginalized sections of the population to the legislative - especially at every level of policy and decision-making - should be envisaged.

(iv) More generally, the need to develop a participatory political culture implies a need to rethink the role of the State in its relations with groups and actors in civil society; a qualitatively different State has to be complemented by a qualitatively strengthened civil society. In fulfilling the role of actively supporting popular initiatives, the State should become an enabler and facilitator, and not simply a provider of services. At the same time, since an effective institutional framework is essential for participatory development, the promotion of NGOs and PD activities should not be at the expense of a strong and capable central authority.

(v) There would be political and administrative obstacles to participatory development in the various types of political system, irrespective of the depth of democracy. These stem from bureaucratic inertia and an ethic of professionalism which is resistant to popular involvement in decision-making. Indeed, an inherited bureaucratic tradition is in contradiction with the participatory principle. Hence, there are real difficulties in reorienting bureaucratic cultures and there is a need for a wholesale retraining of public officials for a PD strategy to be successful. Such retraining schemes would permit the implementation of changes in administrative rules and forms of accountability which are required for an effective decentralization process.

D. Relationships between the actors involved in social mobilization and organization of the poor

74. The new relationship between actors has to take account of the origin of the new impetus in poverty alleviation efforts that adopt a participatory approach. Poor achievements of past efforts were partly due to the lack of participation of the people, who used to be addressed as "intended beneficiaries" but who are now seen as the most important actors. This new distribution of roles implies that one can no longer have "business as usual", but that one must engage in fundamental change. Rather than being driven from the outside and from the top down, the process has to be driven from the inside and from the bottom up.

75. Without such a reversal the likelihood of sustainable achievements at the local level will be minimal in the longer run. While the changes implied in the reversal are quite radical, they need not be introduced in an antagonistic way but through negotiations among partners who share basic values and objectives.

1. Distinctive competence and modes of cooperation

76. It is important that cooperation between community-based organizations (CBOs), NGOs, governments and donors is based on a recognition of their respective "distinctive competencies" - their strengths and advantages. Governments have a mandate for coordinating national development and resource mobilization from external donors; CBOs were more involved in social mobilization and NGOs in working for particular target groups. For example, in the Bangladesh Expanded Programme on Immunization (EPI), the Government took responsibility for supply (drugs, etc.) while NGOs took responsibility for the creation of demand at community level. Donors must work to strengthen these different competencies.

77. Under the impact of the new world order, and its associated ideology, rules and relationships among the different actors are changing, with new roles and responsibilities bestowed on both NGOs and CBOs. This is a welcome development, but it must not be allowed to obscure the legitimate functions of government, which are complementary to those of the other actors. New modes of cooperation are emerging as Northern donors and NGOs seek different relationships with their Southern partners. For example, the German Government has developed an agreement with the German and Tanzanian churches and the Tanzanian Government within the same country-assistance framework. These new institutional arrangements offered considerable potential for the support of participatory development initiatives.

2. Accountability and regulation

78. The new relationship between the actors implies new patterns of control, reflecting a shift in the distribution of power. To make this shift acceptable and sustainable requires increased confidence and trust among the actors. Specific confidence-building measures, such as information, dialogue, and manifestations of commitment, are therefore required.

79. A new pattern of accountability could also help to build up confidence and should rely on a modified system of monitoring and evaluation (M + E). The criteria of evaluation has to include achievements in terms of participation and sustainability. Furthermore, M + E must be participatory in the sense of involving all the actors concerned. It should also be a transparent process, with visible results for the civil society at large, in order to contribute to the general learning process and also because transparency helps to create a climate of confidence.

80. Effective accountability is crucial for all actors in participatory development: NGOs, CBOs, governments and donors. Moreover, discussion should also be focused on the accountability of NGOs, which is less clear than for other actors. NGOs are accountable simultaneously to a range of constituencies: to the people with and for whom they are working, to their funders, to fellow NGOs and to Governments. These multiple accountabilities are difficult to satisfy

jointly. Accountability to the grassroots was felt to be particularly important, but it was observed that, in practice, there was often a tendency to give more attention to accountability vis-à-vis those actors who can influence the activities carried out, in particular through regulatory and/or financial control. There are many ways in which grassroots accountability could be achieved. For example, the Organization of Rural Associations for Progress (ORAP) in Zimbabwe includes elected representatives from grassroots organizations on its executive board, as does the Federation of Fishermen in South India. Effective evaluation is another way of ensuring accountability.

81. On the matter of central regulation of NGOs by governments, there was a divergence of opinion among the participants. Some argued that there was a basic contradiction in the idea of NGOs being centrally regulated by governments. This was reinforced by the observation that, where there is a massive erosion of State capacity in - for example - the delivery of basic services, NGOs had sometimes risen to the challenge of filling the void quite effectively. Others maintained that central regulation by governments - even of NGOs - was necessary in order to ensure that the mistakes of NGOs did not endanger the welfare of citizens or the coherence of development programmes. Furthermore, it was recognized that NGOs did not always achieve their objectives and may be forced, in such cases, to turn to governments for assistance, in return for which it may be necessary to accept some degree of central regulation.

82. Generally speaking, the greater the accountability of the NGOs, the less there would be a need for regulation by government. Governments must not "over regulate" NGOs and CBOs, but on the contrary must protect them and respect their right to organize and operate. Moreover, a degree of regulation is important to ensure that illegitimate NGOs are exposed, that duplication is avoided and coordination maintained at the national level. An approach worth investigating further is that of "self-regulation" or "peer regulation" by which NGOs develop their own codes of practice to regulate each other. Regulation by government is more important where NGOs receive foreign funding.

3. Scaling-up participatory initiatives, and networking

83. The term "scaling-up" was preferred to "replication", since grassroots initiatives can rarely be replicated. What needs to be scaled-up is the participatory approach, not participatory projects per se. Scaling-up can take many forms: organizational experiences, networking, federations working alongside government to promote new approaches, training programmes and so on. Whichever strategy is chosen needs to be planned right from the outset. It was felt that networking among NGOs and the building of federations of grassroots organizations were particularly effective ways to increase the impact of participatory initiatives, for the following reasons:

- networks can maximize the sharing of experience;
- they can reduce the dangers of duplication;
- they enable grassroots voices to be represented in the national policy debate;
- they promote accountability (by exposing ineffective NGOs);
- they can link together to form "networks of networks" with the possibility of international networking.

At the same time, it was also recognized that networks may face problems:

- NGOs may be too competitive to come together, or may not share enough in common;
- networks may become overtly politicized and begin to compete with the formal political process;

- with increasing funding of NGOs by donors there was a danger that larger NGOs may dominate the smaller and more grassroots-based organizations, so distorting the legitimacy of the network.

4. Implications for bilateral and multilateral donor agencies

84. Donors have to be aware of their constraints and be sensitive in their involvement in local mobilization and organization. While they should leave the responsibility for direct intervention at the local level to national actors, both governmental and non-governmental, they should lend their support to this process in the most appropriate ways.

85. Even if donors cannot be assimilated to the local milieu, this should not prevent them from taking full part in the learning process, which participatory development represents. Only through sharing experiences among all involved (CBOs, NGOs, governments and donors) can they gain the deeper and fuller understanding necessary to design and implement their support activities in the most appropriate ways, including facilitating the inter-country networking of expertise and experience. This involvement in the learning process may be organized, inter alia, through "Round Table" discussions.

86. The new vision of participatory development as an internally driven process (although often in need of outside stimulation) calls for major changes in the ways donor agencies operate. The aim of such changes is to enable aid agencies to accompany grassroots mobilization effectively at the pace of the people, rather than exerting a stifling influence through rigidity, time pressure and inappropriate ways of support. More specifically, there has to be increased flexibility in design and implementation of projects and programmes based on better knowledge of local conditions, respect for local perceptions and priorities, and learning as the process is unfolding. This means a departure from the conventional concept of projects as a set of activities, predetermined in time, with definitively fixed targets, means and modalities.

87. By contrast, participatory projects and programmes are characterized by an open orientation phase (which may last from a few months to several years) and by a readiness to make major adaptations during implementation if the need arises. Such adaptation must not be seen as a soft approach associated with the risk of increased aid dependency, but as the result of negotiations with the partners involved, based on new knowledge and changed circumstances.

88. The translation of this new vision and increased flexibility into reality requires a number of changes in aid agencies regarding operational rules, staff sensitivity and skills, and the incentive system governing the behaviour patterns of aid/agency staff. Such changes could be brought about by the following measures, listed by way of example:

- introduction of innovative financial instruments (e.g. trust fund arrangements) which would reduce the disbursement pressure resulting from conventional rules of budget administration;

- adoption of longer time horizons in terms of commitment in principle;

- sensitization and training programmes for staff at all levels, including for consultants (e.g through exposure and dialogue programmes) and changing skill composition of staff through recruitment;

- adoption of criteria for the evaluation of staff performance (determining their promotion or renewal of contract) which are process-oriented and reward achievements in terms of participation.

In implementing such measures, a new agency culture would be created, facilitating rather than thwarting participatory approaches.

Annex

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